

Building Inclusive Communities Through Occupational Therapy



Occupational therapists believe in building strong, vibrant and healthy communities where everyone can participate and contribute regardless of age, ability, culture, and social or economic circumstances. When working to create inclusive communities, occupational therapists focus on the interaction among **people**, their **occupations** (work, leisure and self-care) and their **environments**.

The work of occupational therapists may include:

Enabling people to develop knowledge and skills:

- An occupational therapist may work with disadvantaged women to identify required daily living skills to assist them in advocating for necessary resources. By empowering the women to identify needs and ask for resources, the occupational therapist enables them to develop leadership abilities.

Identifying and developing new occupations:

- An occupational therapist may partner with community members like youth, community leaders and residents to identify new occupations. For teens facing social and emotional barriers to traditional organized recreation programs, the group could encourage a local business to donate space for a studio where the youth could create artwork to display and sell. The occupational therapist enables the youth to participate in a new positive occupation (art), which also offers economic and social opportunities.

Promoting accessible and inclusive environments:

- Occupational therapists often consult with municipalities on universal design principles in city recreation programs. By assessing programs and facilities, and recommending changes to improve accessibility, occupational therapists help increase participation opportunities for residents with differing physical abilities.
- An occupational therapist could also work with a community disability group to develop skills to do participatory action research, with the goal of removing social policy barriers that prevent full participation in community life. The group members bring their experiences of living with disability to inform the development, implementation and interpretation of research while developing knowledge and skills.



Occupational Therapy – Skills for the job of living!

For more information on occupational therapy, visit www.otworks.ca

Based on an article by Gayle Restall, Leanne Leclair and Sheila Banks (2005). Inclusion through Community Development. *Occupational Therapy Now*, (7), 9-11.